

were recognized in Ferguson's time, this record must now be written off as uncertain.

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,

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### 15. A NOTE ON THE COMMON MONITOR, *VARANUS MONITOR* LINN.

Several reports on monitors have been published in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. Without making any reference to or comment upon previous records, the writer wishes to record his own observations.

Breeding season, etc. The breeding season of the Common Monitor, *Varanus monitor* Linn., in Uttar Pradesh, as observed by the writer in Lucknow and Gorakhpur, extends from the middle of April to the end of July. The number of eggs laid by the females of this species varies from 8 to 19 (as was apparent from the collection of eggs on five occasions). The size of the eggs varied from 47×36 mm. to 55×44 mm., the average size of 50 eggs being 49×38 mm. The weight of the eggs varied from 9.3 gm. to 14.5 gm., the average weight of 25 eggs, sorted at random, being 11.4 gm.

On one occasion, the eggs were collected from beneath thick vegetation in a ruined and neglected building, about five miles (8 km.) from the Lucknow University. However, this seems to be unusual because this lizard normally digs a hole in the ground, deposits its eggs in the hole, and covers the eggs with the dug-up earth and other débris in such a way that it is difficult to spot them.

All efforts to get freshly hatched young ones from the eggs under laboratory conditions, for infection experiments, proved futile.

During the course of his investigations on the incidence of opalinid (Protozoa) infections in the preserved specimens of the various species of monitors in the collections of the Zoological Survey of India, the writer came across two female gravid specimens of *Varanus monitor* which were collected from Bikaner State (Rajasthan) on the 5th April 1957. The specimen Reg. No. 20739 measured 54.1 cm. in length, and the other, Reg. No. 20740, measured 35.2 cm. (both measurements are inclusive of the tails). The former

specimen was found to contain 17 eggs, the latter 9 eggs, a result which accords with the assertion of Smith (THE BRITISH AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES, 1954, p. 169) about British lizards that the number of the eggs produced at one time increases with the age and size of the female. The eggs were more or less fully mature; thus, it seems that the breeding season of *Varanus monitor* begins in Rajasthan sometime earlier than April.

Diet, habits, etc. As regards the diet of *Varanus monitor*, all sorts of seizable prey has been included in its menu. However, the writer from his observations on this lizard in the field, and from the examination of the gut-contents of a large number of specimens [as also of the gut-contents of several specimens of *V. flavescens* (Gray), *V. griseus* (Daudin), and *V. nebulosus* (Gray)], feels convinced that these mostly terrestrial monitors feed primarily on large insects (beetles, grasshoppers, roaches, etc.), and small lizards and snakes. Birds and their eggs, small rodents, and other animals are only occasionally preyed upon. They are, no doubt, fond of rats and mice, but in view of their diurnal habits the monitors do not frequently come across these rodents, which are mostly active during the night. Further, the Common Monitor as well as the other terrestrial species mentioned above do not seem to have a liking for an amphibian diet: they probably prey upon frogs and toads in nature, as a last resort only. Vogel [REPTILE LIFE. Translated by Margot Schierl (1958): 32] has justifiably remarked that very few of the monitors will look twice at a frog. The situation in captivity is different, and an anuran diet will not be rejected.

*Varanus monitor* seems to be a very hardy animal in respect of withstanding starvation. During the course of his researches at the Lucknow University, the writer managed to keep some specimens of this lizard starving for over seven months in captivity.

In the plains, the Common Monitor hardly digs a burrow for itself; it mostly occupies the burrows of rodents, or hides itself in thick vegetation or neglected buildings; it takes to ponds and pools but rarely. The writer has never seen young ones of *Varanus monitor* taking to trees; adults, when cornered, readily climb up a tree; also sometimes for the sake of eggs and chicks of birds.

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